

# ROAD BOWLING

WEST'S AWAKE | Drimoleague bowler Denis O'Driscoll won the 2013 All-Ireland Junior A title



## O'Sullivan ended Carbery's wait for third All-Ireland with 2012 success

In the final part of this series, we look at the recent All-Ireland junior A championships

THE Carbery division had produced a stream of worthy junior A winners in the 18 years since John O'Brien achieved outright honours in 1993 but a third county for the division was proving elusive.

That changed in 2012 when Liam O'Sullivan reached the pinnacle after a splendid campaign. The Caheragh native was a natural to the bowling game, a stylish practitioner much in the mould of his grandfather Bill Barrett who engaged in a score or two with the great Mick Barry.

A hard-won Carbery final when O'Sullivan bettered the tenacious Michael Crowley at The Marsh Road was grounding for his county and All-Ireland winning run that started with a narrow last-shot victory over City's Brian Daly at Lyre.

O'Sullivan showed his class in a tremendous county semi-final win over North Cork's John O'Rourke at Toghher Cross and weathered a shaky start to out-bowl North East's Patrick O'Donoghue in the county final at Templemartin. Donal Daly was the Ulster champion and it took a storming finish from O'Sullivan to take the All-Ireland crown in the August series at Knappagh.



Carbery's Liam O'Sullivan, with the Denis O'Brien Cup, celebrates with family and supporters after winning the 2012 All-Ireland junior A championship.

The paucity of junior A county winners in West Cork was stark, with just two achieving outright honours in five and a half decades of championships. Denis O'Driscoll from Drimoleague bridged a long gap when winning the 2013 championship. Strong and fiercely competitive, O'Driscoll won the hard way. The Drimoleague man overhauled a bowl deficit to forge a last-shot win over Vincent Kiely in a tough quarter-final at Clondrohid and had to pull out the stops again in the

semi-final against Billy McAuliffe of North East.

Not wavering from his goal, O'Driscoll defeated City's Peter Nagle in the county final at Whitechurch and, with the City venue new All-Ireland hosts, it was back there on a July Saturday of severe heat when he faced a tough Ulster champion for the national title. The *Southern Star* report on the day sums up a tense duel: 'James Oliver, a fine Ulster champion, will rue missing a last shot that was well within his compass but the doggedness and will to win that are O'Driscoll's hallmarks were evident again in a fraught encounter.'

Mid Cork took a stranglehold on Junior A in 2014 and 2015. Sean Murphy had the bowling and pedigree to make a successful charge on the county junior A championship of 2014. The Brinny man, a nephew of 1970 champion Pat Murphy, had come from a bowl down to defeat his cousin Kieran in his regional final and in the county rounds got the better of East Cork's Paul Butler in the semi-final. He was underdog in the county final at Grange where he faced City champion Peter Nagle, but produced his best form in an emphatic win. It did not go his way in the All-Ireland shoot-out at Portmor, Blackwatertown in August where a resurgent Ruaidhri O'Reilly was the master.

Paul Buckley from Crossbarry kept the Fr Michael O'Driscoll Cup in Mid Cork with a forceful display in 2015, as he

accounted for Gaeltacht's Jerry O'Riordan and City's Thomas Boyle on the way to a county final meeting with North East's Billy McAuliffe. After a stirring duel at Templemichael Buckley prevailed and duly won the All-Ireland cup on a wet Saturday at Lyre when getting the better of Malachy Lappin thanks to four outstanding opening shots. County runner-up in 2013 and '14, Peter Nagle returned in style to claim the 2016 county and All-Ireland junior titles; he set up a county decider with Carbery's new champion James Nagle. The Ross man had achieved national honours in lower junior grades and was buoyed by a terrific semi-final win against Johnny O'Driscoll at Derrinassa but, despite a game effort, could not deprive the City champion on this occasion.

The All-Ireland series at Madden that weekend had many highlights, chief of which was Kelly Mallon's miracle bowl that put paid to Geraldine Daly's hopes of national honours, but high on the list was a brilliantly executed 15th shot delivered by Peter Nagle under extreme pressure from blind sight at the 'Black wall' - that was instrumental in him holding off the spirited challenge of Ulster's Mark Toal.

A unique junior A family treble for the Cooney family was achieved by younger brother James when he annexed the 2017 county with a wonderful run that saw him bring the championship to East Cork for

the ninth time, excluding Willie O'Donovan's Mayo-based successes. A brother of '96 and '97 winners, PJ and Denis, James Cooney's easy flowing style was prominent in big performances at Whitechurch where he eliminated Michael Murphy (North East) and David Hubbard, North Cork champion. He was consistency personified too in the final at Templemartin where he eclipsed 2009 champion, Johnny O'Driscoll (South West). Former Under-age star and Armagh senior midfielder, Ethan Rafferty, was the formidable Ulster champion but the All-Ireland at Grenagh wasn't played due to the Cork champion being unable to participate.

The 2018 champion came from Rylane in North Cork. John O'Rourke had been threatening a season to shine and it came with a series of superb performances that saw him beat City's Cian Boyle in the county decider and Ulster champion Sean Donnelly in the the-Ireland.

That the junior A championship retains its lustre was evident in a thrilling series in 2019. Billy McAuliffe, runner-up in 2015, possessed a steely determination in this campaign and eliminated both London's Colin O'Donovan and former senior great Pat Butler to earn a showdown with Andrew O'Callaghan at Ballyvourney. It was a tense encounter on the wide Cuil Aodha road and, in a pressure finish, McAuliffe took the title back to North East for only the third time.



West Cork champion Denis O'Driscoll (Drimoleague) won the 2013 All-Ireland junior A championship.

It was a similar scenario in the Ballyvourney All-Ireland series on the same road when McAuliffe encountered Ulster champion Sean Donnelly. In a rip-roaring encounter that produced a finish for the ages, McAuliffe again prevailed beating a sweeping last shot from his Ulster rival.

To 2020 and hopefully this wonderful championship will retain its unbroken sequence, even if not within the calendar year. It has been an enjoyable trawl through the decades. Our thanks again to many, especially Gretta Cormican, who unearthed photographs old and new as well as archived reports. Thanks too to Seamus O'Tuama, James O'Driscoll, Dominic Morgan, Mick O'Driscoll and all with whom we were in contact with as the weeks went on.



Ból Chumann  
na hÉireann

All bowling cancelled during present Covid-19 Level 3 restrictions